

## SHEREE MITCHELL OF COLUMBUS SELECTED SBA NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS PERSON OF YEAR



*Sheree Mitchell, center, with SBA Administrator Hector Barreto and Deputy Administrator Melanie Sabelhaus*

Sheree W. Mitchell, who opened her first Columbus, Georgia-based day care center with the help of an SBA-backed loan, was named *National Small Business Person of the Year* during ceremonies on May 20<sup>th</sup>. She received her award at SBA Expo '04, the agency's three-day conference in Orlando that celebrated National Small Business Week.

Ms. Mitchell competed for the national award after being named Georgia's Small Business Person of the Year in early May. She received her Georgia SBA award at a luncheon in Atlanta hosted by the Georgia Lenders Quality Circle. She was nominated for her statewide award by the University of Georgia Small Business Development Center in Columbus.

"One of the beautiful things about small business is that a go-go entrepreneur like Sheree Mitchell can see an opportunity and seize it, and build a successful enterprise from scratch," said SBA Administrator Hector V. Barreto in presenting the national award.

Mitchell has grown her business into a \$5 million a year enterprise. Her company, Growing Room, Inc., cares for more than 850 children, and employs more than 170 people in five centers in the Columbus area.

"Sheree is a wonderful example of great entrepreneurship combined with a great sense of civic responsibility," said Terri L. Denison, SBA Georgia District Director. "We are truly proud to have her as the Small Business Person of the Year for Georgia and the nation."

A recognized expert in the industry, Mitchell is the 41<sup>st</sup> annual National Small Business Person of the Year, and the second from Georgia. She was selected from among the state Small Business Persons of the Year representing the 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and Guam.

Mitchell began Growing Room, Inc. in 1989 when she used an SBA 504 development loan to build her first child development center in Columbus. She added 20 employees during the next two years as the center filled. By 1992, Mitchell realized that she needed more space and built a \$400,000 addition, adding 12 more jobs to her staff to handle the expanding business.

In 1996, she opened a second Growing Room in

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## Stronger SBA Means Better Programs and Customer Service

By SBA Regional Administrator Nuby J. Fowler

I recently celebrated my 2<sup>nd</sup> anniversary as Southeastern Regional Administrator for the SBA. Working with you to assist small businesses across the region continues to be a high point in my career. With your help, the SBA has set a new standard for program delivery and broken all records for the number of small businesses benefiting from our lending, counseling and training programs. I am particularly proud to be a part of the SBA as we celebrate the agency's 50<sup>th</sup> year of service to America's entrepreneurs by creating a new SBA; an SBA with new streamlined processes, more efficient operations and a renewed commitment to customer service. Together we are building an SBA for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



It should be reassuring to small business that Congress and the President have acted to strengthen SBA's flagship 7(a) loan program. With President Bush's signature, loan authority under the program has increased by \$3 billion. This 30 percent increase in funding allows the SBA to reach out to thousands more small businesses than ever before and to lift the temporary restrictions that were instituted earlier this year. The program improvements create a more stable and self sufficient program. The result will undoubtedly be a spike in 7(a) lending activity followed by new businesses starts, businesses expansions and job creation.

Over the past few months, I have been traveling across the region, meeting with our lending partners to discuss issues of mutual concern and to encourage greater participation in SBA loan guarantee programs. It is encouraging to see such broad interest in our programs within the lending community and to hear how critical the SBA is to their ability to make capital available to small businesses. We are committed to expanding the availability of SBA-backed loans and to working with all of our partners to make that happen.

I am confident about the SBA's future. We stand today as a stronger, leaner agency with greater singleness of purpose than at any time in our history. Our focus continues to be America's 25 million small businesses.

### SBA & USDA Announce New Efforts To Put Capital in Nation's Rural Areas

Small Business Administration Administrator Hector V. Barreto and Agriculture Secretary Ann M. Veneman announced an Administration effort to stimulate rural business development and jobs by providing greater access to venture capital investment funds.

The SBA, on behalf of USDA, will enable venture capital companies to offer access to capital to rural enterprises under a newly created business and jobs initiative called the Rural Business Investment Program (RBIP).

"The RBIP program will help to create an environment in which small rural businesses can grow and create jobs," Barreto said. "President Bush's leadership on this important issue will make a real difference in the lives of small businesses in rural areas."

USDA and SBA will publish in the Federal Register guidelines for making application to the new program.

In general, with funding provided by USDA, the RBIP will allow newly formed venture capital firms to leverage private capital funds with government financial assistance.

Created by the 2002 Farm Bill, the RBIP will license Rural Business Investment Companies (RBICs) to support up to \$60 million in guaranteed RBIC debentures, based on the Bush Administration's FY 2005 budget.



### SBA Marketing Calls on Lunch Crowd

Jorge Valentin-Stone, SBA Economic Development Specialist, explains agency programs to Debbie Zuluaga at the Peachtree Center Food Court. Ms. Zuluaga and her husband have a start-up firm, Habitat Designs, which is importing furniture and home fixtures from Columbia, South America. She stopped by the SBA display table during her lunch break from her job at IKON Office Solutions.

## COLLECTRONIX CEO GETS HELP FROM SCORE

Stanley Brown is one of those business executives who had plenty of corporate management experience. But his resume was very limited in actually starting a new business.

Fortunately, this 41-year old entrepreneur knew his own weaknesses when he went to the Atlanta Chapter of SCORE for help when he launched his firm, Collectronix International. SCORE, a volunteer organization funded by SBA, offers counseling and training for small business owners who are starting or expanding a business.

After a recommendation from a business associate, Brown contacted SCORE in early 2002 and was assigned Counselor Sal Norman in its Atlanta office.

"Mr. Norman exemplified a wealth of knowledge and experience on establishing and running a successful business," said Brown an Ohio University graduate. "With his encouragement, I attended several SBA/SCORE workshops that covered business plan writing and securing bank financing."

Brown was also introduced to the SBA's Business Information Center (BIC) resource library which is housed, with SCORE personnel, in the agency's Georgia District Office. "We found that the BIC was a tremendous source of information for people who either want to start a business but don't know where to start, or people who want information



**Stan Brown, left, with SCORE Counselor Sal Norman**

about a specific business endeavor," recalled Brown, a former VP in Bank of America's Factoring Division.

Brown's company has grown to 9 employees and provides debt collection and debt recovery solutions to its clients. His executive background covers 16 years in the accounts receivable field.

## SBA Presents Six Small Business Awards in Georgia

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North Columbus, creating 32 new jobs.

A registered nurse, Mitchell is active in community affairs, including the local Chamber of Commerce, Rotary Club, United Way and Girl Scouts organizations. She has served on the Pre-K Peer Review Committee for the state regulatory body for childcare in Georgia.

### Other 2004 Small Business Awards

In addition to Sheree Mitchell, the SBA Georgia District Office presented five other statewide awards to owners and supporters of small business in Georgia.

The 2004 award recipients include **Andrea Rose Fox**, founder and CEO of Epic IT Inc., the Young Entrepreneur of the Year; **Marilyn Matheny**, President and co-owner of St. Simons Radio Inc., the Small Business Journalist of the Year; and **William P. Marshall**, a retired businessman and former chairman of the Dade County Industrial Development Authority, the Financial Services Advocate of the Year in Georgia.

**Mary S. Rodriguez**, a business consultant, was selected the Women in Business Advocate of the Year, and **Frederick E. O'Neal**, an investment representative with Edward

Jones & Company, is the Minority Small Business Advocate of the Year.

Both Ms. Matheny and Marshall also received the "Champion" Award presented by the SBA Southeast Regional Office in recognition of their unique and outstanding achievements on behalf of small business.

Ms. Fox, who will turn 30 in August, has grown her IT service firm to a staff of 15 employees and sales of nearly \$1 million in only four years.

Matheny's company, St. Simons Island Radio, operates WVEZ-FM, a small non-commercial radio station that airs business related programs to listeners on St. Simons Island and around Glynn County.

Since Bill Marshall retired to the Trenton, Georgia area over 12 years ago, he has been a driving force behind numerous economic development and community improvement programs in Dade County.

O'Neal, based in Carrollton, Georgia, joined Edward Jones & Company in 1988 and was named the firm's National Director of Minority Development in 1998.

Ms. Rodriguez, a business consultant for over 20 years, is President and co-owner of the HilRod Group Inc., an Atlanta-based financial and management consulting firm.



# From the Desk of the District Director



Terri L. Denison

Aha! Since my note to you was not in the usual “front and center” spot on the front page, you probably thought that I had decided to take this issue off. With the SBA’s 2004 National Small Business Person of the Year being our own Sheree Mitchell of Columbus, Georgia, I was inspired to take, with pride, the “backseat” in this issue of the *Georgia District Office Voice*.

On May 20, when Sheree received this great honor, I was pleasantly reminded of several things:

- The decision I made a few years ago to go “out in the field” where our small business clients and resource partners are was the right one. In this arena, I get to put a face with the statistic or form. Seeing a very overjoyed Sheree receive public kudos for hard work, perseverance, and business success had quite a different effect on me than reading a business name from a list or in a stack of papers.
- Our assistance impacts not only the small business owner, but his or her employees as well as the neighborhood and community where the business operates. When I think back to or meet the business owners that have received our assistance and are prospering, I am reinvigorated and encouraged to keep “fighting the good fight.”
- Georgia is a great place to start and grow a business. We have a wealth of talent, a relatively good economy and a pro-business environment. I am quite fortunate to have the opportunity to serve as your SBA District Director.

## Atlanta SCORE Chapter Selected As Finalist for Chapter of the Year

The Atlanta SCORE Chapter was selected as a finalist for 2004 National Chapter of the Year. The chapter earned this consideration through its proven success in meeting the needs of the Atlanta small business community. Fewer than 10 of SCORE’s 389 chapters nationwide were finalists for this recognition.

“The SCORE Chapter of the Year recognizes those chapters whose volunteer counselors have exceeded high standards for counseling small business clients,” explained Fred Abood, Atlanta Chapter Chairman. “This includes expanding counseling offerings, community outreach, and programs that benefit local small businesses.” This year’s SCORE Chapter of the Year was Richmond, VA.

“Atlanta SCORE counselors show tremendous dedication to ensuring the success of small businesses in their community,” noted SCORE CEO Ken Yancey. Since 1964, the SCORE Association has assisted more than 6.5 million aspiring entrepreneurs. To find a SCORE office near you, visit [www.scoreatlanta.org](http://www.scoreatlanta.org).

## SBA's new 'Business.Gov' Web Site Will Connect Business with Federal Agencies

The U.S. Small Business Administration has launched a Web site that will serve as *the* business gateway for American businesses to connect with federal agencies, providing specific business tools and resources.

One of the 24 “e-government” initiatives of the federal government, [www.Business.gov](http://www.Business.gov), is an official Web site of the U.S. Government and is operated and maintained by the SBA.

“In today’s fast-paced marketplace, small business owners need a single Web site where they can access vital information quickly,” said District Director Terri Denison. “This new site gives them the timely data they need.”

### Business.gov provides information and links to:

- **Business Development:** information on starting, managing, and marketing a business.
- **Financial Assistance:** resources for capital and credit.
- **Taxes:** federal and state tax resources, forms and assistance.
- **Laws and Regulations:** Laws, regulations and other resources that affect business.
- **Federal forms and Buying and Selling:** links for doing business with the federal government

## First African-American Owned Microtel Uses SBA 504 Loan

The Microtel Inn & Suites in Lithonia, Georgia, which was partially financed with an SBA 504 development loan, celebrated its grand opening with a ribbon cutting in mid May. Hosting the special event were the hotel's owners: Rick Branch, Vance Harper, Michael Patterson and Wayne Harris.

The opening marks the first and only African-American owned hotel in the history of DeKalb County. The Lithonia property is also the first African-American owned hotel in the Microtel flagship. There are currently 256 Microtels open or in development across the country.

A 504 Loan, secured from Georgia Certified Development Corporation, an SBA Certified Development Company, helped finance the \$3.2 million facility at 2980 Evans Mill Road. The 504 financing package includes a private-sector loan by The Peoples Bank in Lithonia.

The property is located in close proximity to three major destinations: the 25,000-member New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, The \$2.1 billion-dollar Mall at Stonecrest, and the proposed National Heritage area of Arabia Mountain Park.

With high visibility from I-20, the hotel expects to attract visitors and tourists from the area as well as family reunions and corporate meetings. "We couldn't be happier with the way the area is developing around our site," says co-owner Rick Branch.

The Lithonia facility, with 15 employees, opened informally in early April of this year. The Lithonia Microtel is attractively constructed of brick with a stately entrance, full landscaping and a lighted parking lot.



Photo by Bud Smith

*Joining in the hotel opening were, from left, Mike Patterson, owner; Charles Penner, GM; Wayne Harris, owner; Mike Leven, President of Microtel Inc.; Vance Harper, owner; Vernon Jones, CEO of DeKalb County; and Rick Branch, owner.*

The hotel features 60 sleeping rooms and a large meeting room. "We are excited about the growth of Lithonia and this hotel is a welcomed addition to our community," said Mayor Darold Honoree.

There were 137 SBA 504 Economic Development Loans approved in Georgia in FY 2003, totaling nearly \$80 million.

## Use of SBA Surety Bonds is Up in Georgia for FY 2004

Despite earlier slow downs in the economy, the use of SBA-backed surety bonds continues to increase in Georgia. The use of performance bonds by small contractors was up 32 percent for the first half of FY 2004, while the dollar amount on final bonds, at nearly \$24 million, is up 13 percent over last year.

The Small Business Administration (SBA) can guarantee bonds for contracts up to \$2 million, covering bid, performance and payment bonds for small and emerging contractors who cannot obtain surety bonds through regular commercial channels.

A surety bond is a three-party instrument between a surety, the contractor and the project owner. The agreement binds the contractor to comply with the terms and conditions of a contract. If the contractor is unable to successfully perform the contract, the surety assumes the contractor's responsibilities and ensures that the project is completed. This explains the types of contract bonds that may be covered by an SBA guarantee:

1. Bid - Bond which guarantees that the bidder on a contract will enter into the contract and furnish the required payment and performance bonds.
2. Payment - Bond which guarantees payment from the contractor of money to persons who furnish labor, materials equipment and/or supplies for use in the performance of the contract.
3. Performance - Bond which guarantees that the contractor will perform the contract in accordance with its terms.

A contractor, in construction or services, can apply for an SBA bond guarantee if they qualify as a small business, and their average annual receipts do not exceed \$6 million for the last three fiscal years.

Roy Moore is the owner of Roy Moore Painting and Contracting in College Park, Georgia. He has used SBA guaranteed bonds since his firm entered the agency's 8(a) Business Development Program nearly two years ago. "It (bonding) has worked out for me," said Moore. "I would recommend the program to others."

Moore said he used The Surety Group in Atlanta for most of the bonds that were required on about 15 government contracts awarded to his company so far under the 8(a) Program. His biggest SBA-backed bond was used for a half-million dollar contract for roofing repairs on the federal courthouse in Paducah, Kentucky.